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SUBJECT: MOQTADA AL SADR ISSUES STATEMENT ON RECENT FIGHT WITH ISF
AND U.S. AND ON ALLEGED MORTAR ATTACK ON HIS HOME

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AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[11](#). (U) This is a SET Najaf cable.

[12](#). (C) Summary: Radical anti-American cleric Moqtada Al Sadr met March 26 in Najaf with clerics from his organization and members of his Mahdi Militia. He called on them to be calm and show restraint in the wake of renewed fighting with Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and U.S. forces in the Sadr City section in Baghdad on March 26. This meeting came on the heels of a reported mortar attack near Sadr's residence in Najaf on April [126](#). Sadr told his followers to remain vigilant, however, and be prepared to combat any action by the "invaders." Finally, he dispatched a group of Mahdi Militia members to Baghdad to help secure Sadr City and to provide protection for pilgrims headed south to Najaf to commemorate the death of the prophet Mohammed. End summary.

[13](#). (C) On March 26, an explosion occurred in the Al Hannah quarter of Najaf near the Qumail shrine and the residence of Moqtada Al Sadr. Initial reports from Sadrists who were near Sadr's house stated that there had been a mortar attack on his residence. There have been press reports describing the incident as a mortar attack, with one report from an Iraqi news outlet stating that Sadr's office and the Iraqi Police (IP) Chief in Najaf were the sources for this information (with a quote to that effect from the IP Chief). However, according to an Iraqi Army Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) officer, when the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) responded to the scene, they were not allowed near the site. The Iraqi Army EOD officer asked for fragments of the "mortar." None were turned over and at least some of the Iraqi Army officers involved are unconvinced that there had been a mortar attack. Instead, an Army officer speculated that a "flash/bang" grenade had been responsible for the explosion. Sadr's security personnel are known to possess flash/bang grenades and the reluctance to allow inspection of the mortar round(s) caused some suspicion among the ISF.

[14](#). (S) Moqtada Al Sadr called a meeting late on the evening of the March 26 with his clerics and security forces. During this meeting he insisted that all Mahdi Militia show restraint, but maintain vigilance. Sadr placed these forces on "high alert." He also ordered members of the Mahdi Militia to travel north to help secure Sadr City and roads likely to be used by pilgrims headed south to Najaf to mark the death of Mohammed. Sadr also said that it was time to apply pressure to the national government to condemn the acts of aggression against his followers and to act to stop such attacks. Sadr's comments were relayed to SET Najaf local staff by a source familiar with the contents of the meeting.

¶5. (C) In the late night meeting, Sadr condemned the recent alleged actions of Coalition Forces both in Sadr City and in Najaf. Sadr noted that during the coming anniversary of the prophet's death, these acts are an insult. He asserted that he would like to see loyalist clerics renew the emphasis on this anniversary to make it a more important date in Shi'a Islam. And finally, at the conclusion of the meeting Sadr released a statement.

¶6. (C) Begin statement: By the name of God, we have been informed that the invaders want to lead the Iraqi people to war and into crisis, especially those from the so called Sadrism entity. So I call on my brothers not to be dragged into western schemes, especially on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the prophet of Allah. Therefore, I want everyone to maintain calm and I call on the armed forces to protect the pilgrims, cooperate, and increase their efforts because our enemies are waiting for us. End statement.

¶7. (C) Comment. Sadr's summoning of clerics and militia members in Najaf and the dispatch of forces to the North point out a need to preserve political influence by appearing strong in the face of "incidents." While recent reports indicate Sadr's willingness to take part in the political process, his base is and will be for the near future, the 18 to 30 year-old males who have joined him in his "struggle" and who will expect a resolute response. Sadr will have to walk a tight rope, perhaps responding in kind, but avoiding a repeat of his August, 2004 fight with Coalition forces. Recently, south-central Iraq has been relatively quiet. Sadr may decide to stir the pot here as a reminder that he is still the tough kid on the block. End Comment.

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